

SUMMARY OF 2016 AREA SUMMER MEETINGS

All six MCCPTA quad-cluster areas met this summer to discuss issues affecting our students and our schools. Organized by Area Vice Presidents and Cluster Coordinators, these annual meetings provide a chance for PTA leaders and parents to ask questions, discuss and share concerns and with MCCPTA leadership and elected leaders. MCCPTA Executive Committee officers attended each meeting.

A detailed list of comments by area is included and has been shared separately with each area's AVP and CCs. Below is a summary (in no particular order) of comments and concerns mentioned repeatedly in two or more areas.

CLASSROOM ISSUES

- Achievement/Opportunity Gap: Members want more specific plans and programs to address and *effect* MCPS' achievement gap. Some note that it's more appropriately called an "opportunity" gap because poverty and socio-economic status more accurately predict academic achievement challenges than race and ethnicity.
- GT/Accelerated Instruction, Choice/Magnet programs: There was *lots* of discussion about the recent Choice Study and making GT, AP and IB classes more widely available to all students, especially in non-magnet schools. Based on the study, there are concerns that magnet programs be based on merit (not lottery), and that siblings will no longer be automatically or preferentially enrolled.
- Other Curriculum Issues: Members want grade 4/5 compacted math back, and more and *earlier* teacher training before curriculum changes are implemented.

- Technology: Parents, teachers and administrators want more technology, sooner, in classrooms – specifically Promethean Boards and Chromebooks. Several areas questioned the pushed-back delivery of second-grade Chromebooks. Many schools don't have enough to share, which is a problem with new standardized testing methods that require technology.
- Class Sizes: The consensus is they're too big across the board in many schools, causing parents and teachers to leave for other public and private schools. Some fear large classes are also causing student stress and mental health issues (see below).
- Staffing: There aren't enough lunch/recess aides, classroom assistants or administrators in overcrowded or large population schools (especially elementary, which tends to have one assistant principal even when enrollment equals or excels middle schools).
- Calendar & Bell Times: Parents want more discussion and early notice of the proposal to start school a week earlier next year. Elementary parents especially want MCPS to revisit the new bell times. They think young children are getting home too late, affecting bedtime.
- Foreign Language Instruction & Translation: Members are pushing for more foreign language instruction in elementary schools. In schools where it's available, there's concern the threshold to qualify – two grade levels ahead in English – is too high. Schools should be *required* to translate materials and ConnectEd messages. Can MCCPTA help MCPS provide language classes so PTA families can better connect and understand one another?
- Student Mental Health: Parents want more resources for mental health services for students and note that crowded classrooms contribute to high student anxiety and stress.

BUILDING ISSUES

- HVAC: Multiple areas mentioned HVAC systems are breaking down, creating unbearably hot and cold classrooms where students can't learn. MCPS should more aggressively replace HVAC systems, not just repair.
- Rev-Ex: The clear message from parents: keep Revitalization-Expansion projects on track and funded! Many schools have old schools that are falling apart. Several mentioned needed roof repairs. Patchwork repairs aren't working. Schools far down the Rev-Ex list fear repairs won't be funded since they're scheduled for replacement – but not soon.

COMMUNITY ISSUES

- Socio-Economic Issues: To provide a equitable education, more resources are needed in schools with a predominately low-income population. Can MCPS supplement the cost of field trips in these schools so students can get the same opportunities as more affluent peers? MCPS should re-consider how funds are distributed to assure equitable experiences when some school communities have significantly more resources than others.
- Development & Overcrowding: There's concerns that continued residential development is overcrowding schools with no plan to address this issue.
- PTA Engagement: How can PTAs better engage families, especially those who are not traditionally involved? Can MCCPTA help local units more with local/school PTA issues, not just big-picture county and state advocacy?
- Gang Violence: Gangs, drugs and crime in communities surrounding our schools raises concern about student safety. How can MCCPTA and MCPS address this?